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Governor-elect Mikie Sherrill's Inauguration Remarks As Prepared for Delivery

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The Door to Opportunity is in New Jersey

Honorable Chief Justice and Justices of our Supreme Court; my fellow governors; our esteemed congressional delegation; Mr. Senate President, Mr. Speaker, Majority and Minority Leaders; members of the legislature; elected officials; reverend clergy; honored guests, family, friends.

And most importantly, New Jerseyans, up and down the state.

I'm incredibly honored to be standing here before you as the 57th Governor of the great State of New Jersey.

I want to thank everyone who's traveled from near and far to be here today. You've made this day truly special.

My aunts and uncles, brothers-in-law, cousins, nieces, and nephews, I can't tell you how much it means that you are here. Mom, Dad, Megan, Mary, I love you guys so much. My classmates from Hunters Wood Elementary School, Langston Hughes Middle School, and yes, the great South Lakes High School Class of 1990. Mr. Jenkins, my principal, and Ms. Cascio, like so many people, I wouldn't be here today without the great mentorship of wonderful teachers.

My classmates from the Naval Academy and shipmates and servicemembers from the Navy — starting with Plebe Summer to duty stations around the world, it wasn't just my training that informed my sense of service, it was all of you.

And in the U.S. military, we've always said we never fight alone. That's because we fight alongside friends and allies. Thank you to all of our ambassadors and consuls general for joining us today.

Everyone from the U.S. Attorney's Office, working with you right down the street at the Rodino building was an honor. And despite the troubles that our former office is now facing, I know your dedication to justice is unwavering.

My colleagues from Congress, thank you for your continued fight for healthcare, education, and good jobs. America is lucky to have you fighting for her.

I also want to give a special thank you to Governor Phil Murphy and First Lady Tammy Murphy. You both have truly shepherded our state through perilous times. Your dedication to improving the lives of working families, including raising the minimum wage and fully funding the pension for the first time in decades speak to your enduring concern for New Jerseyans. Thank you.

There is another governor who I am so sorry can't be with us today. Although Governor Codey just passed away, his dedication to our state and his connection to her people won't be forgotten.

I want to thank Essex County Executive Joe DiVincenzo, Mayor Ras Baraka, and the people of Newark for hosting us today. Thank you.

I want to thank the men and women of labor, especially the workers who proudly take care of this magnificent building.

Congratulations to our Lieutenant Governor, Dr. Dale Caldwell, and his daughter, Ashley. Lieutenant Governor, I am incredibly lucky to have a partner like you, and I look forward to making history with you today.

To my kids, Maggie, Lincoln, Ike, and Marit.

You are all the reason I am doing this, and I am so proud to be your mom.

Finally, to my husband Jason. You are a steady hand in the chaos of raising four kids and running multiple elections, you offer sage (and



sometimes not so sage) advice, and you have been a true partner in the challenges we have taken on. You are amazing, and I love you.

Thank you to every single person here today. I value your support as we embark upon this administration, and the challenges and opportunities ahead.

We enter 2026 commemorating our nation's 250th anniversary. New Jersey has been at the heart of our American story. The crossroads of the revolution. The site of our first major victory at the Battle of Trenton. The first state to ratify the Bill of Rights.

I am honored that, as we gather here today, we do so with New Jersey's original parchment copy of the Constitution on stage with us — one of only 13 known to still be in existence. A document, by the way, New Jersey *unanimously* ratified.

The Constitution, born out of challenges of the early republic, clearly lays out our values: to form a more perfect union; to promote the general welfare, to secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.

You see, inherent in our Constitution is a framework for opportunity. A commitment, a covenant, that ties generations together.

This commitment to opportunity for the people of our country is also known the world over as the American Dream.

Like so many families, my American story did not begin that auspiciously. From what relatives have told me, it includes people fleeing a farm... and others fleeing religious persecution. Even once they arrived here, the road to success was uneven. Poverty, economic devastation. Sometimes building something for your family only to lose it because of forces beyond your control.

But over and over, this country has offered my family opportunity found nowhere else in the world. From my grandfather landing a good union job after the war, to my opportunities in the first class of women eligible for combat roles in the Navy, the American Dream starts with opening a door. With an understanding that, no matter who your parents are, where you are from, what religion you practice, or ethnicity you claim, the doors to opportunities in this country should be open to everyone.

That is the story of New Jersey. And yes, we are far from perfect. But generations of families have found their American Dream here. Immigrants sailing here from overseas, Black families leaving the South to find work in New Jersey, people from all over the country and all over the world again and again, finding opportunity here in this state.

And that's because New Jersey is an incredibly special place. The course of American history has been determined here. It was just across the street in Military Park, where the cannons were just fired, that Thomas Paine began to pen his pamphlet, the American Crisis, and galvanized a nation. Or during the Industrial Revolution, when Trenton built this great nation. Picatinny Arsenal, constantly defending our hard-won freedoms at the Arsenal of Democracy. Here in New Jersey, we have invented everything from the lightbulb to the moving picture to the laser; produced and inspired artists from Sinatra to Springsteen to SZA.

New Jersey never gets enough appreciation. So, as the newest leader of our great state, for all these artists, battles, and innovations, I wanted to take a moment to say, "You're welcome, America."

And I'll also assure you that our state will continue our great history of standing in the breach when our nation needs us.

You see, what makes us special is that sometimes, in some moments, the impossible is possible here in New Jersey. So we are unafraid to take on tough challenges. We never assume we've lost the fight before we enter the ring.

When I get asked — and believe me, I get asked! — Were the results of the election a surprise to you? I can honestly say no. Not in the least.

Because I know the people of New Jersey. Yes, we are loud and brash, sometimes we can like it's 1980, our Giants, Jets, and Eagles don't even claim our state despite our rabid devotion, and there are an inordinate number of young men who wear chains (including my two sons!).

We go home and speak different languages. You know, in this election I learned that in South Jersey, they pronounce Taylor Ham "pork roll!" But we all go home at night and hug our kids and worry about them. We worry about our parents. We worry about ourselves and our future. But because we live here, we refuse to give in to fear or despair.

That spirit — defiant, yet always looking to the future — has always defined us.

In fact, not too far away, in the greater Camden metropolitan area, in a place called Philadelphia, Thomas Jefferson wrote a Declaration of our independence, marking the birth of our great nation.

This entirely unique and revolutionary Declaration claimed human beings had universal rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Not because of who their parents were, but because every human being is endowed with these rights by their creator. Not by a king.

The earth has rarely seen an idea put to paper that has ignited such a fire in her people, a fire that has burned for 250 years. As enslaved people,



women, oppressed people from around the world and from every walk of life read our founding documents and demanded their own path to those universal rights. Our Declaration denounced tyranny, and listed those attacks on our rights committed by England's king:

The list of grievances in our Declaration of Independence included these charges against the king:

He has refused his assent to laws.

He has obstructed the administration of justice.

He has made judges dependent on his will alone.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies, without the consent of our legislatures.

This election proved that the people of New Jersey recognize the parallels. That we see a president illegally usurping power. He has unconstitutionally enacted a tariff regime to make billions for himself and his family, while everyone else sees costs go higher and higher. Here, we demand people in public service actually serve the public instead of extorting money to benefit themselves and their cronies.

On November 4th, the people of New Jersey once again gave the nation a glimmer of something it hadn't felt in months: hope. Yes, 250 years after the Declaration, 250 years after General Washington crossed the Delaware into the promised land, I am proud that once again, New Jersey is leading the way.

And I want you to know that I will be fighting for you. And I hope, New Jersey, you remember me when you open your electric bill and it hasn't gone up another 20 percent. I can promise you, it won't be because I waste your money on a ballroom at Drumthwacket.

I am going to spend every minute trying to make New Jersey more affordable and open doors to opportunity across our state.

That's our history here, opening doors to opportunity. Patriots who manned Harriet Tubman's Underground Railroad stops from Cape May to Jersey City; Labor leaders like Peter McGuire who spurred the fight for fair wages and good working conditions; Alice Paul who fought for equal rights including a women's right to vote, and Rabbi Joachim Prinz, who fled Nazi occupation and came to Newark, marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, and reminded us that "the most urgent, the most disgraceful, the most shameful and the most tragic problem is silence."

Not here. Not New Jersey. These are some weary years. But I'll be damned if in this state, at this time, we cry any silent tears.

We refuse to be silent as doors are shut on too many of our friends and neighbors. Too many children and seniors who don't have enough to eat, people who work too hard and still can't get ahead, communities living in fear, children who are afraid that their parents will disappear in an ICE raid while they are at school.

As we see Washington trying to shut the door on opportunity, on your safety and security, on education, on healthcare, on access to good jobs, on innovation, and investments in energy and infrastructure, as we are seeing doors shut for families, for working people, for vulnerable communities, as they attempt to roll back the tide of progress – not here.

We are made of stronger stuff here. We are going to keep the doors open for your family. The doors that were opened for my family that led me here today.

We're keeping the doors open and helping small business owners like Chuck, who owns a coffee shop and beer brewery in Clarksboro, we're keeping the doors open for Nadia, who owns a small restaurant in West New York, Bill who runs a barbershop in Trenton.

We're keeping the doors open for Chris, a Laborer in Jersey City who is trying to raise his kids and support his parents.

We're keeping the doors open for students like Adam in Glen Ridge, so they don't face bullying as we take on the challenge of mental health and social media.

We're keeping the doors open for the Patel Brothers and businesses on Oak Tree Road in Edison as we navigate a federal tariff regime harming so many store owners and keeping costs high.

We're keeping the doors open to millions of parents who want to keep their kids safe and ensure they have a bright future.

Much like Noah's Ark once provided safety for the righteous, it's appropriate that we are in Newark today to create a new haven, a New Ark to open the doors for those who thirst for liberty and prosperity. For all who seek to strengthen our democracy, strengthen our economy, and strengthen our families.

And key to all of this is opportunity. Opportunity is not a guarantee of success. It's a guarantee at a shot. New Jerseyans know that.



That's why our state always punches above our weight — because we know exactly what we can do if we are given a shot. We can lead scientific innovation. Create art that moves millions. Build businesses to lift up entire communities, and homes to pass on to our kids.

But for families to succeed, they need to be able to afford to live here, to thrive in New Jersey.

In too many cases, the promises from politicians to open doors to opportunity have been empty — platitudes that don't address the key issues keeping families up at night.

But I promise as your governor: if it's keeping you up at night, it's gonna be keeping me up at night.

As I have travelled across this state, speaking to thousands of New Jerseyans, your stories stuck with me.

But even more often, I heard you talking about your concerns for others: how are my neighbors going to feel safe? How are my children going to succeed? How are people who are struggling going to get access to food and healthcare? And most inspiring, "How can we help?"

Your stories are why, again and again, I am reminded of why I love New Jersey.

And I have heard — beneath the noise, beneath the politics — a simple truth.

Too many people are working too hard and still falling behind. They worry about rent or mortgage payments that rise faster than paychecks

They worry about the cost of childcare that rivals college tuition.

They worry about utility and healthcare bills that feel unpredictable and overwhelming.

They worry about whether their children will be able to build a life in this state.

These concerns are not abstract. They are not ideological. They are an everyday reality for the people of this state.

So let me tell you plainly what my administration stands for:

Lowering costs. Taking care of our kids. Making government accountable to the people.

As we get to work charting out success, I have listened to you, and I have heard you.

I have heard you in Trenton, where you want safer streets for kids, redevelopment programs that work and provide jobs, and for the state to pay its fair share.

I have heard you in South Jersey, where you want jobs, transportation investments, innovative businesses, and not to be forgotten or left behind.

I have heard you in Hudson County, where you want housing you can afford and to open small businesses without costly bureaucracy and red tape.

I've heard you, New Jersey — we are facing an affordability crisis, and you want costs to come down.

And you want that to begin today. You don't want a strongly worded letter, you don't want a 10- year study, and you don't want empty words. In short, you are sick of the status quo. Well, guys, I am too.

So, right now, yes, before I even finish this speech, I am going to sign my first in a series of executive orders to declare a State of Emergency on Utility Costs. First, I am issuing an Executive Order giving the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities the authority to pause new utility requests for additional rate increases, and I will freeze rate hikes to finally provide families with real relief on their energy bills.

Second, I am issuing an Executive Order directing the Board of Public Utilities to open solicitations for new solar and storage power generation, to modernize gas and nuclear generation, so we can lower utility costs over the long term.

This is just the beginning. We are going to take on the affordability crisis, and we are going to shake up the status quo.

It won't be easy, and hard choices have to be made to drive down costs as the federal government slashes funding and slams doors to opportunity.

But as I learned in the Navy, the only easy day was yesterday. Luckily, we don't need easy here in New Jersey. We have grit, we are tough, and when you hurt our families, we are ready to fight — to fight for jobs, for housing families can afford, for good schools, safe streets, ending



skyrocketing utility costs.

Look, I know there are people here who didn't vote for me. And I know some of you will be in my office someday yelling at me about some disagreement. And yet, as we all sit here today, I am ready to fight to ensure you can do just that, without fear of reprisal or worry that you will be investigated or unfairly prosecuted.

I took an oath over 25 years ago to do just that, and you saw me take it again today. I am not a leader who will shirk in the course of my duties.

I learned a lot of important lessons in the Navy. I learned that often, it's not the profound or the revolutionary that is needed to accomplish the mission. Sometimes, it's the basic brass tacks of getting the job done, recognizing and doing your duty.

Under this administration, agencies will be judged by results, not rhetoric. We will work to make government more transparent. We will work to save you time and money. You may not agree with every decision we make, but you will know why we made it.

And you will know that all of our decisions are made putting you, the public, first.

To my esteemed colleagues in the state legislature, my cabinet, and all the elected officials and civil servants across the state: we have all chosen this path of public service, it's a noble calling, and it is a privilege. We have a shared responsibility, and opportunity, to make people's lives better.



We do so through competence, knowing that others are depending on us so they can open their business, feed their families, or ensure their children are safe and attend great schools.

We must have a strong moral compass to serve. Self-dealing and opportunism are antithetical to our service.

And we have to serve with compassion. Sometimes, we work with people at tough times in their lives. When they have suffered a tragedy, when a loved one is facing prison, when they are scared for their children. Or maybe, as I can personally attest to, after they've had a tough day and had to bring their colicky baby with them to get a driver's license. It's in our power to make their lives easier, better.

And at the heart of it, we serve with commitment. A desire to better the world.

At the dawn of our nation, as some of our very first public servants embarked upon their work to better New Jersey, the people of New Jersey chose a state motto. They were among the first to do so. On the heels of a horrible war, they narrowed in on those two things that they felt their countrymen had fought and died for: Liberty and Prosperity.

Today, I take up their work once again. Protecting liberty, ensuring that power is not placed in the hands of a few, but rather that the universal rights of all New Jerseyans are protected.

And prosperity, through opening the door to opportunity.

That is my commitment to you as your 57th Governor.

Thank you.

God Bless the great State of New Jersey, and God Bless the United States of America.

Governor Mikie Sherrill

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Office of Governor

PO Box 001

Trenton, NJ 08625

